

*The Christian's Overtbrow prevented, and
Conquest gain'd.*

12649

A

SERMON

PREACH'D before the

QUEEN,

AT

Saint JAMES's Chappel,

On Sunday, April 22. 1705.

ROM. xii. 21.

*Be not overcome of Evil, but overcome Evil
with Good.*

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Ordinary to Her Majesty.

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R O M. xii. Ver. 21.

Be not overcome of Evil, but overcome Evil with Good.

TH E R E is no one Gospel-duty that is more solemnly enjoin'd, or more vehemently inforc'd, than that of Brotherly-love and Charity; and (as the necessary Preservative of that) mutual Forbearance and Forgiveness. And indeed, (to use some of St. *Paul's* own pathetic Words) [*Phil. 2. 2.*] *If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of Love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any Bowels and Mercies: That is, If Men had any competent Sense of Tenderness or Humanity, of the Endearments of reciprocal Love, of that spiritual Union and Sympathy which ought to be between those who are Members of the same Body, of the infinite Love of G O D, so kindly, so comfortably extended to us through his own dearly Beloved Son Jesus Christ. In brief, If the kindly Propensions of Nature, or the gracious Influences of the Holy Spirit had their due Operations upon Mens Hearts, we might well expect to see the happy Effects of it in their Christian Deportment one towards another; in their Kindness and Tender-heartedness, their Humbleness of Mind, their Meekness and Long-suffering, and their readiness to forgive, even as God, for Christ's sake, is merciful to forgive them.*

This, I confess, appears extreamly reasonable in Speculation, considering the many Engagements, and the powerful Inducements that we have to the Performance of this Duty. But yet, *God* knows, there is but little of it to be seen in Practice and Experience.

For alas! there is so gross an Allay of Weakness and Corruption in Humane Nature; so many Seeds of Discord in our very Make and Constitution; such Disorder in our Passions; such

such disagreeableness in our Tempers ; such interfering in our Interests ; so many occasions of Offence, given or taken ; so many Bones of Contention to set us a snarling and biting, and devouring one another, that it must needs require a very great Composedness of Mind, and no moderate degree of Grace, to stifle the sense of Injuries, which is usually very keen, and to suppress the desire of Revenge, which is every whit as passionate, and to keep up our Christian Charity still warm and fervent, amidst so much, and (as it will always appear to the present Sufferer) such provoking Iniquity as the World abounds with.

And therefore, since this must be confessed to be a pitch of Virtue that has its Difficulties, our blessed Lord was pleased to lay his Command on Us, in Words as clear and as full as possible ; [*Matth. 5. 44. &c.*] *to love our Enemies, to Bless them that Curse us, to do Good to them that Hate us, and to Pray for them that despitefully use us, and persecute us.* And this Command he has pressed upon us by all the Considerations of Duty and Gratitude, and the most engaging Motive of his own matchless Example. And, lest any thing should be wanting that might win upon us, the Spirit of God has vouchsafed to ply us (if I may so speak) with all variety of Arguments ; and in particular, so far to condescend to our Infirmities, as to convince us of the reasonableness and expediency of complying with this our Christian Duty ; for which his Authority alone, who injoin'd it, might have serv'd instead of all other Reasons.

And of this the Text is one gracious Instance. For, after the Apostles had strictly inhibited Revenge. *Ver. 19.* as being an invasion upon GOD's Prerogative ; and directed to a more innocent way of vindicating ones self, *Ver. 20.* by such acts of Kindness and charitable Benevolence, as might be enough to mollify and melt the very Heart of an Enemy ; He adds at last as a close to the whole Exhortation, *Be not overcome of Evil, but overcome Evil with Good.* In which he plainly points at the Folly and Unhappiness of a vindictive Temper, and the Prudence and Privilege of the contrary : Inasmuch as the one apparently lays a Man open too greater Inconvenience than those, which he endeavours to ward off by Revenge ; which is a Weapon indeed made only for Offence) subjecting him to his Enemy, and rendering him a slave to his Passion ; and exposing him to all those Sins, and to the ill Consequences of those Sins, into which such a furious Passion may happen to drive him. Whereas the other, *i.e.* a mild and forgiving Nature, makes a Man perfectly superior to his Enemy ; and at the same time an absolute Master of himself, enabling him even when he is most rudely assaulted, still to maintain his Charity, and to preserve his Innocence.

And it shall be my Endeavour at present, from these Topicks.

First. To dissuade and deter you from the Practice of Revenge, by making you sensible of the great Inconveniences and Hazards, to which you must needs stand exposed in thus suffering your selves to be overcome of Evil : To which part of the Argument I shall subjoin some special Directions, that may help to prevent this fatal Overthrow. And,

Secondly. To incite you, if I can, and win you over to the Practice of Forbearance and Forgiveness, by making you equally sensible of the happy

Advantage of thus *overcoming Evil with Good* : And to this part of the Argument I shall add some farther Reasons, to spur you forwards, and direct you in the pursuit of this noble Victory.

First, I shall endeavour to dissuade and deter you from the practice of Revenge, &c. And to this purpose let it be consider'd,

First, That the Passion of Revenge is a Symptom of great Imbecillity and Weakness. For it has been always observ'd, and very truly, by such as have studied Human Nature, * That they who are most infirm in Body or Mind, are most apt to be frowardly angry and revengeful. Whoever therefore shews himself to be of this unhappy Disposition, discovers in effect his own Weak-side, and gives his Enemy the fairest Mark that can be : He betrays himself at least to want the Courage to bear an Injury, and therefore he may easily be thought † to want the Power to return one. And this whets an Adversaries Malice, and encourages him to redouble his Blow ; where he finds such a quick sense of Smart, and so little Patience to endure it. And there is this particular Fatality that attends that impatience thirst of Revenge, That it helps to defeat it self ; and not only throws a Man off his Guard, and leaves him naked to any Assault ; but often deprives him of the benefit of a good Cause, and the best means of his own Vindication. Thus, for Example, if any one through the unadvisedness of his Passion repels Force with Force, he thereby debars himself of that easier Redress, and more valuable Satisfaction, which the Law would have given him ; and is guilty of a Breach of the Peace as well as the first Aggressor. And if he who has been wounded by a slanderous and opprobrious Tongue, must needs attempt to revenge himself with the same unlawful Weapon, both the Revilers (for Revilers they are both) are plainly upon a level ; and neither of them can hope to have Right done to his own Reputation, without submitting to do as much for the other ; which is an Office that perhaps neither is fond of ; and which the one might easily have been free from, if he could have been content to hold his peace, whilst he had the other at an Advantage. So that he who will inconsiderately pursue his Revenge by such means as an hasty Spirit is wont to dictate, is most manifestly *overcome of Evil*, even in this Sense ; That is, of the *Evil* of those Injuries, which he has not the presence of mind to defend himself from, nor the firmness to abide, nor the conduct to procure any suitable Redress for. But,

Secondly, A revengeful Person is overcome of Evil in a much worse Sense than this ; not so much by the Man who is his Enemy (as St. ‡ *Chrysostom* notes upon the place) as by the violent motion of his own rude and raging Passion of Anger. A Passion that especially when it is push'd on by the eager desire of Revenge, is very impetuous and headstrong ; and but too apt to hurry one into any thing that is Evil.

And in truth, the Man that has once given up the Reins to so masterless a Passion, has tamely parted with the Government of himself, and is no longer a competent Judge of what is fitting, or decent, or reasonable, or lawful to be done. So far from it, that he is of all things prone prepos-

* *Arist. Rhet. l. 2. c. 2.* † *Vid. Juven. Sat. l. 3.* ‡ *Chrysost. ad Rom. Horn. 22.*
troussly

rously to imitate him whom he most hates, and in those very Practices too which he most complains of, and with the justest Reason. You shall hear him, for instance, making great Out-cries against the injurious Treatment he has met with from his Neighbour; and yet he wishes, he watches with the utmost impatience for an Opportunity to repay him his own with usury. You shall hear him lamenting the want of Temper and Charity in his Adversary (and to do it with the greater *Pathos*) he shall be sure to express himself with all the uncharitableness and bitterness of Spirit imaginable: and his Actions shall prove upon all Occasions, that his Words were meant in too much earnest.

And thus the pretence of his Complaint becomes his own real Sin, and leaves him without excuse for it, because he does the very same Thing that he complains of, or something as bad or worse: For the Retaliation seldom falls short of the first Injury. His Neighbour perhaps has been unjust, or perfidious, and therefore he is malicious and unmerciful: His Friend has prov'd ungrateful, and therefore he is Implacable: His Child has prov'd Undutiful, and therefore he will be Unnatural. As if the more he were provok'd by his Fellow-Creatures, the more he were resolv'd to provoke God; or as if the great need he had to ask Forgiveness at God's hands had made him the more obstinate in denying it to his Brethren. So fatal a Tendency has the fix'd Habit of Revenge to enslave Men to an ungovernable Passion, to put them upon very unreasonable Practices, and to entangle them in many grievous Sins: and therefore such Men may in seriousness be said to *be overcome of Evil*, in a moral Sense, as being brought under the habitual Power of it. But,

Thirdly, There is still a worse, and more deplorable Sense (tho' consequent upon the former) in which a revengeful Spirit is *overcome of Evil*: *Overcome*, that is, *of the Evil One*, who is a perpetual Tempter to all manner of Evil; and will be sure to improve so fair an opportunity for it to the very uttermost: For when a Man has once harbour'd Rancour and Malice in his Heart, and nurs'd it up to an habitual Desire and Study of Revenge, he has so far given place to the *Devil*, that it will be hard to cast him out again: Nay, he is actually become so much of a Temper with him, that it can be no easie matter, for a mind so possessed, to discern between its own proper motions, and the suggestions of that wicked Friend. But, to be sure, those suggestions can hardly fail of ready Entertainment and Compliance, that prompts him to the Execution of his Revenge, and points him to the nearest method of accomplishing it, be it never so base or unworthy, wicked or detestable. Hence the common Observation of Witches, and such as enter into Confederacy with the Devil, that they are People of a dark, sullen, malicious Temper, who have so much Will to do Mischief, that they cannot rest till they get their Power enlarg'd, in some proportion to their Spite; though it be upon the desperate Stake of their own precious Souls. Hence is it, that Murders are so frequently committed, and in the most infidious and barbarous manner, without the least signs of Horror or Remorse in *Italy*, and all those Countries that are most remarkably addicted to Revenge. Nay, is it not hence too that the Sense of this crying Sin is

so much abated even among us, who are a People rather naturally inclin'd to Pity, and tender of Blood? For I can ascribe it to nothing else but some *Satanical* Infatuation, with which the God of this World hath blinded Mens Minds; that the imaginary Notions of Honour, or the pusillanimous Fear of passing for a Coward; or the prevalency of meer Custom should embolden them, in defiance of all the *Laws of God and Man*, to Fight and Murder one another in set Duels; and to play the last Prize for Damnation, with more unconcernedness than perhaps would be shewn upon a much better occasion, even in Defence of their Country and Religion. In the meantime but too apparent, how pernicious a thing it is, to give Scope and Indulgence to a prevailing Habit of Revenge, lest *Satan* should thereby get an Advantage of us; and we should be so perfectly overcome of that *Evil one*, and subjected to him as readily to commit any the most horrid Act of Wickedness, rather than leave our malicious Designs uneffected.

And now let me appeal to you, What is there that a Man would not do; what is there that a Christian ought not to do, rather than suffer himself to be fatally overcome of *Evil*; to have his Weakness perpetually exposed to the Attempts of his Enemies; to become enslav'd to a boistrous and unruly Passion; and to be so miserably reduced under the Dominion of Sin, and the Tyranny of *Satan*?

If therefore I could offer any thing by way of Advice or Direction that might help to prevent this fatal Overthrow, or rescue Men from the sad Effects of it, I hope I should be heard with Patience. And, amongst many Directions that might be given, I chiefly propose such as follow.

First, It would be very advisable, in order to stifle Revenge in its very Conception, to keep a strict Watch upon the Passion of Anger; especially upon those sudden and violent Eruptions of it, which if unrestrain'd would urge a Man to a hasty Execution, before Reason has had time to examine, or pass a deliberate Sentence. For what a Man has been surpriz'd into rashly and unreasonably, he is often tempted (such is the Perverseness of Human Nature) to defend resolutely and pertinaciously: And the very Sense and Shame of having done what he cannot answer, makes him persist in it, and repeat it. So easie is it for him to be overcome of *Evil*, that once gives way to it: But above all things, it ought to be our heedful care, not to cherish and encourage the Resentments of our Anger; not to suffer it to rest in our Bosoms, to sleep with us after Sun go down, and to rise with us next Morning, or to take up its fix'd Abode with us, upon any colour of Right, or Presumption of Reason whatsoever. For, by these Degrees, the sour Passion will soon form it self into a settled Habit of rank mischievous Malice, and so easie to be dislodg'd again. And this is the very Reason of that Caution of our Apostle's [Eph. 4. 26, 27.] *Let not the Sun go down upon your Wrath; neither give place to the Devil: who is so subtle and dextrous at Mischief, that he ought to have the least matter given him to work upon.* For the smallest spark, if once blown up by him, is enough to set on fire the whole Course of Nature; and therefore it ought to be carefully extinguish'd e'er it grows and gathers to so dangerous a Flame.

Secondly,

Secondly, It will be highly requisite always to have an awful Regard to the Hand of Providence, which is the supreme Disposer of all Things; and not to fasten our Eyes with bitter Spite upon the immediate Instruments of the Wrongs that we suffer. For they may be Base, Wicked, Perfidious, Ungrateful, Cruel, or what we please to call them: but God is Just and Holy in all his ways; and whatever we suffer, (as we suffer nothing but by His Appointment or Permission) This we are sure of, that we have most rightfully deserv'd it, let his Instruments be what, or who they will. And, in strictness, we have just as much Reason to grow very angry, and vow our Reason against the Weapon that hurts us, as against the Person that strikes with it, since both are but Instruments (tho' a different kind) and both under the Governance and Restraint of Divine Providence. This was the Consideration that supported and compos'd holy Job's Spirit, under those great and unexpected Calamities that befall him; and taught him with Equanimity to say, after he was spoil'd of all his Goods [*Job 1.21.*] *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the Lord:—* And not—*Curfed be these Sabeans and Caldeans, that have undone me.* This was it that quell'd all David's impatient and resenting Thoughts, when he was so bitterly revil'd, and treated with so much Indignity by *Shimei*: He had those about him, that were ready enough to be the Executioners of his Revenge; but all that he had to say was, *2 Sam. 16.10, 11.* *So let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?*

Thirdly, It will be very proper to consider, under any injurious Provocation, that the Person whom we look upon as a Trespasser against us, is at the same time a Sinner against God: That the Wound which he gives his own Soul, is more grievous, and, without Repentance, more incurable than any Hurt that he can do us: That he cannot escape, even tho' we should not pursue him with our Revenge; because he is in the Hands of that God to whom *Vengeance, eternal Vengeance belongeth.* And therefore, if God thinks fit to spare and forbear him, why should we be transported beyond all Patience, and presume to take the matter out of God's Hands into our own? Especially since there is abundantly more reason to pity him, than to study Revenge upon him; for we can hardly find in our Hearts to wish him more Mischief, than he is industrious to pull down upon his own Head: Nay, and we ought to have some Respect, some Pity for our selves too; lest, offending God by a bold Usurpation of his Prerogative, we also fall into the same Condemnation.

Fourthly, It will be an excellent Expedient to suppress all Thoughts of Revenge, if we chuse to consider the ill Offices that we meet with, not strictly as Injuries, but rather as so many Temptations and Stumbling-blocks, that are cast in our way to interrupt the Course of our Virtue. For as, if taken in the former Notion, they are too apt to urge us to Precipitancy and Impatience; so, when consider'd in the latter, they would serve to make us more sober, and cautious of falling into so obvious a Snare.

For what if another has done me great Injustice, must I therefore part

with my Innocence ? What if another be envious at me, must I therefore be malicious against him ? What if another has loaded me with unjust Censure and Calumny, must I therefore forfeit my Temper and my Charity ? Must I injure my self, because I have been injur'd ? Shall I gratifie my Enemy, by letting him see, that he has been too hard for my patience and my virtue ? And shall I offend God, my best Friend, purely on his account ? No ! It is certainly of all things the most ridiculous, to turn wicked out of a meer grudge ; and to Sacrifice my Innocence to one that has cast away his own already. Whenever therefore we find our selves staggering, and in danger of being over-born by the strength of any such Temptation, let us confirm our selves by that Philosophical Saying of *M. Antoninus*,* that might well become any *Christian's* mouth ; “ Whatsoever any body may do or say, for my part I must take care to be good : And let the *Christian* add, “ It is my duty, to be sure, as a *Christian*, “ To have always a Conscience void of Offence towards God and towards Men. Acts 24. 16.

Fifthly, To imprint all these calm thoughts the deeper upon our minds, it will be necessary frequently to reflect upon the sinful State of our own Souls, and the infinite hazard we are in, if God should be extream to mark what we have done amiss. Let it be remember'd then, that God is the Supream Judge and Avenger of all Unrighteousness ; and that he standeth before the very Door ; that the Time is not far off, when he will take exact Cognizance of all the Actions of Men, in order to recompence them according to their Works, and to the fruit of their Doings. And surely the Sense of this common Danger should be enough to unite and reconcile us ; surely the Apprehension of God's terrible Judgment should teach us at least not to grudge one against another, lest we be all condemn'd ; and not to practise Revenge one upon another, lest we all drink deep of Vengeance. O therefore, whosoever thou art, be warn'd in time ; † Mortal since thou art, let not thine Anger be Immortal : Let not the last Sun set upon thy Wrath : Carry not thy inveterate Malice with thee to the Grave——for it will not leave thee there——It will follow thee to God's dreadful Tribunal, where thou and thine Enemy, divided tho' ye are at present, must appear one Day together. And both, 'tis to be feared, in equal Confusion, because both liable to the same heavy Doom, even to Judgment without Mercy, for being unrelenting and merciless to each other. Why then shouldst thou so madly pursue Evil, when thou pursuest it to thy own inevitable Death ? Is it possible thou should delight to heap Coals of Fire upon thine own Head, such as are never, never to be quench'd ? Is it possible that the devilish Pleasure of thy present Revenge should be so incomparably sweet, that the very Remembrance of it should be enough to conquer the Sense of Pain even in Hell it self ? O no ! that very envious and malicious Temper, even the Devil's own Likeness, which thou chusest to wear now, shall be another Hell within thee here-

* L. 7. 15. † *Aristot. Rhetor. l. 2. c. 21.*

after ; when once thou shalt be condemn'd for the mischief thou hast done, and depriv'd of the very Capacity of doing any more ; except it be upon thy self, in gnashing thy Teeth, and gnawing thy Tongue, and curling the Hour of thy Nativity, and bemoaning the continuance of thine Existence, and fretting against the God of Heaven, and maligning the Inhabitants of that happy place to all eternity.

And now, having dispatch'd the first part of my Argument, I proceed

To the *Second* thing propos'd, *viz.* to incite you, if I can, and win you over to the Practice of Christian Forbearance and Forgiveness ; nay, and of loving and doing Good to your very Enemies, by making you equally sensible of the happy Advantage of thus *Overcoming Evil with Good*. And to this purpose it is to be consider'd,

First, That the Man, who is meek and merciful, courteous and obliging to his very Enemies, has by that means so much the ascendent over them, that without receiving any Impression from them to his own hurt, he has it almost in his power to mould them into what he pleases, and to make 'em even such as he would wish to have them.

For indeed as a froward and revengeful Temper is a shrewd sign of Pusillanimity and Weakness, so a mild and merciful Disposition naturally betokens Generosity and Greatness of Mind. It *M. Anton. l. 11.* is no piece of Manhood at all to be very angry and fretful ; *c. 18.* but meekness and gentleness, as it is much more human and civil, so it is much more manly too, in the Opinion of that Princely Philosopher afore-cited. It is a disposition this, that seems plainly to have the Superiority even in Nature : But when it is improv'd upon virtuous Considerations, and becomes a confirm'd habit in the mind, he does indeed render a Man eminently superior to his Adversaries, and sets him even above the reach of injuries ; above that uneasy sense of them at least, which make impatient Spirits so ready to sink under them. Whereas he that accustoms himself sedately to expect Injuries, and resolutely to bear them, still preserving his Temper and his Patience, quite blunts the edge and breaks the force of 'em : And all the Attempts that can be made upon him become just as ineffectual, as beating the soft Air, which is of too yielding a Nature to receive any sensible mark or impression from the hardest blow. So that the patient Man has this manifest Advantage, that he cannot be much aggriev'd, tho' he be never so much injur'd : for, as he is not perfectly insensible of a Wrong, so the Smart that he feels from it is not great, no more than he can easily and with Evenness endure. And in this respect he is certainly an overmatch for the most spiteful and malicious Enemy. For Malice can never be at rest, but when it has done mischief to some purpose : But, when it spends it self in vain, and finds its utmost Efforts still fruitless and unsuccessful, then it turns upon it self ; and prays inwardly, and is a perpetual Torment to the guilty mind that labours with it. And it is always in the power of a meek-spirited Man thus to defeat an Enemy. He can be sufficiently (and yet innocently) reveng'd of him, by pitying his Folly, and despising his Fury : He can make his very Eyes sure to see so much Goodness in one he hates : He can

can gall and vex him to the Heart, by a generous return to an unworthy Provocation: In short, he can confound him quite, by shewing himself to be, in all the contention between them, much the better, and the wiser, and the greater Man of the Two; and indeed as unlike to his opposite as is possible. And this is a Method of Revenge approv'd and applauded by the best Moralists, (1) even not to be like an Enemy, according to *Antoninus*, or to be (2) Good and Virtuous one's self, which was *Diogenes* his Direction in the Case: And (3) *Plutarch* lays it down for a Rule too, If you would vex the Man that hates you heartily indeed, that you must not make it your business to represent him as an effeminate and incontinent, a scurrilous and uncivil Fellow; but study rather to approve your self as a Man of Virtue and Sobriety, and Truth, and Probity, and Humanity, and Candour to all whom you converse with. For this would be a silent, but a visible Reproach to him. Every body will be ready to condemn him for envying and maligning such conspicuous Worth and Innocence; and even he himself (if he has any remains of Shame) will go near to be ashamed, to see his own gross Failings and Imperfections exposed so nakedly to the view, and upon so disadvantageous a Comparison.

Hitherto therefore it appears, that Meekness and Patience are more than equal for the Combat with Malice and Wickedness; and Reason readily subscribes to the practicableness and expediency of this Apostolical Rule of *Overcoming Evil with Good*.

But the more the Rule is practised, and the farther the Practice of it is extended, the more compleat is the Victory that will attend it. For, if to see an injur'd Person, when insulted by outrageous Malice, not only patiently bearing it, but quietly passing by all other Methods of Revenge, beside that of a noble Contempt; I say, if such a surprising Sight as this, could hardly choose but fill even him that did the Injury with secret Shame and Confusion; what Operation may it not be expected to have, when the same innocent and injur'd Person, not contented only to forbear and to forgive, pursues his very Persecutor with Courtesie and Kindness, and endeavours to reduce him by all seasonable good Offices, and by all the Overtures of Reconciliation, and Invitations to Friendship that he can think of. (4) Such resolved Goodness, sure, must be enough to subdue the most obstinate Ill-nature; or at least, he that can resist (5) the subtle and insinuating force of such wonderful Love as this, must have a heart, one would imagine, made of hardest Steel or Stone;—he must be a very Monster of Inhumanity. For were there but the least mixture of ingenuity or tenderness in his Nature, it could hardly fail of a better effect; even the same that our Apostle gives us a reasonable Assurance of in the Verse foregoing my Text, *If thine enemy hunger feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head*—Coals, that when once they come to touch his Heart, will melt him down (be he made of never

(1) *M. Anton in l. 6. 6.* (2) *Plutarch. de Aud Poetis.* (3) *Plut. de exp. ex in Util.* (4) *Senec. de Benef. lib. 7. c. 3. Vincit malos pertinax,* (5) *Plut. de exp. Inim. Util.* such

such stubborn Metal) into easiness and compliance, and refine him from all his unsociable Passions, and fit him for your Familiarity and Friendship.

And he that can thus tame one of the most untractable Passions in Human Nature; he that can thus make a Friend of a Foe, does indeed *Overcome evil with good*: for he conquers him and civilizes him at once, and is in a fair way to make a thorough Convert, and a good Christian of him into the Bargain. For the loveliness of that Vertue which has won upon him thus far, and the prevalency of that Example which has already cur'd him of the Malice that he bore to a Person who so little deserv'd it, will be of equal Service, it may be hop'd, to convince him in all other Cases, That Hatred and Revenge are upon no Terms to be tolerated in a Christian. In as much as all Christians, as such, are as nearly and as strictly allied, as are the Members of the same Body; and are therefore obliged, by virtue, of their mutual Sympathy, to put on Bowels of Mercy, Kindness, Humbleness of Mind, Meekness and Long-suffering one towards another. And the Treatment of this kind, which he himself unexpectedly met with, when he was the Trespasser, will (it should be presum'd) be always sufficient to induce him to shew the same Tenderness to those that trespass against him; never forgetting Christ his Saviour, who purchased the full Pardon of all his Sins, for him at God's hand; nor his Christian Brother, who so frankly forgave him, and so generously obliged him, when the case was once his own. A happy Issue this, when so it proves of an unfortunate Beginning!

And a pleasing Prospect doubtless it must be to the Meek, the Humble, and the Patient Soul, whenever the Enemy approaches, to perceive himself to be placed as it were in an Eminence above him; and that he is still able to keep himself quiet and undisturb'd, notwithstanding all the rude Attacks that can be made upon him; Nay, to perceive that without striking a single stroke, saying one word, he can be most sweetly and innocently Reveng'd; only by continuing firm to his Duty, and unshaken in his Constancy. And it must needs enhance this Pleasure, to conceive probable hopes of softning the roughest Passions, and vanquishing the sturdiest Opposition of an Enemy by pure dint of Courtesie and Kindness; especially when there is ground to hope that the true Principle of Christian Charity may at the same time be infused into his Breast, and become the gentle Guide of all his future Practice. And is it not matter of just Triumph, that G O D should give such Power unto meer Men (to him be the Glory given) of thus *overcoming evil with good*? But,

Secondly, It is farther to be consider'd, That tho' the patient Man should not be so perfectly Victorious over his Enemies, or the Victory should not have all the good effects upon them that might be expected, yet he is still sure to preserve the entire command of himself; and, if he makes a right use of the Opportunity that he has in hand, he may reap great Benefit as well as Satisfaction from it.

For in the first place, It is no inconsiderable Instance of Virtue in Solomon's Account, for a Man to govern himself steadily under Provocations, and to withstand the too natural Instigations to Revenge: *For he that is slow*

slow to Anger; says he, is better than the Mighty; and he that ruleth his Spirit, than he that taketh a City, Prov. 16. 32. Because it is the Care and Business of this good Man to restrain those boisterous Passions, which in such warlike Exploits are wont to be let loose, and become the Abettors of Violence and Cruelty. And whereas the one is chiefly effected by brutal Force, or some Art invented to make the Havock of War more dreadful, and less resistable; the other is purely owing to steady Conduct and well-weigh'd Deliberation. For, as the *Wise Man* observes again, *The Discretion of a Man deferreth his Anger, and it is his Glory to pass over a Transgression, Prov. 19. 11. 1000 i. e.* It is the effect of that prudent Command which he has over himself; and, as such, it is truly commendable.

And, as the good Government of a Man's self, and a Mastery over his own Passions, is it self a virtuous Attainment; so 'tis a Safe-guard to his other Virtues, and a great Preservative to his Innocence; especially when he happens to meet a disingenuous Provocation, or some very base and unworthy Treatment. For, if in that critical Juncture a Man be not well upon his guard, he may easily be transported beyond his Temper, and beyond the Bounds of Duty. Whereas, if he has been us'd to keep his Passions under an habitual Curb, and to hold the Reins strict in his hands, he is at liberty, when any such Occasion presents it self, to consider it coolly and deliberately: He is at leisure to strip the Injury of those aggravating Circumstances, in which it usually appears at the first view; and he wants not the Presence of Mind to make the best Advantage of what was meant, 'tis like, for an Ill-turn, but, by dextrous Management, may be improved into a Good one.

To make this plainer by Example: Perhaps there is nothing almost, that can grate harder upon an ingenuous Spirit, or an innocent Heart, than Obloquy or Calumny that is undeserved: When a Man's Integrity is causelessly brought in Question: When his good Actions are industriously misrepresented: When he is maliciously charged with what he knows nothing of, but only that he is Innocent: and, when upon this groundless Accusation, he is expos'd to popular Hatred (if in a publick Station) or to the dislike or ill-opinion of his nearest Friends and Acquaintance (if in a private Condition:) I say, perhaps there is not a Provocation more uneasie and grievous to be born than this. And yet the Man that is provided of the needful Furniture of Christian Patience, and that passive Valour, which a good Conscience only can give one in the Day of Trial, will be enabled to pass even through this severe Ordeal, and come off at last Honourably and Triumphantly. His Innocence is a perpetual Spring of Comfort within him; and therefore he will neither be immoderately cast down, nor provok'd, by the Indignities that he suffers. He has too much firmness and resolution, and too conscientious a sense of his Duty, to be driven from it by any Discountenance or Discouragement of others; much less will he meanly desert it, and flinch from it, out of meer Resentment, and the Ill-digestion of the Injuries which he has been forc'd to swallow.

low. No! He will rather look upon this to be the proper Field to shew his Courage and his Conduct in. And therefore he will muster up the whole force of his Reason, and call in the Succours of Religion, to sustain this violent Shock of Envy, till the Storm be quite passed over. In the mean while, he will not fail to perform his Duty in all points with the utmost Exactness and Circumspection; depending upon Time and Providence for a fuller Vindication of himself; and not doubting but the Time will come at last, when Detraction and Slander shall be glad to hold their Tongues and hide their Heads; or else forc'd with much reluctance, to confess, That that Virtue must needs be genuine, which has been so much exercised, and so severely tried, and still appears, like the Gold out of the Furnace, so much the brighter and the purer. And this is the advantageous use, the happy improvement, which he that is as resolutely Patient, as he is Virtuous and Innocent, will make of an occasion the least promising for good of any other.

And whosoever is endu'd with any good measure of Patience, may, if he list, make this or the like Advantage of the Spite and Ill-will of his Enemy; whether he is accused by him, or not accused by him; or whether truly, or falsely. If he is accused, and that with too much Reason and Truth, he will lay his hand upon his heart, and say, My Conscience has told me as much before: How often have I been secretly upbraided in my own thought for this very thing? And now it comes to my turn to be more openly reproach'd for it, why should I take it so very heinously?—even tho' it be from an Enemy:—Or why should I deem him an Enemy, whom God hath appointed to be in the stead of a Friend, to tax me home with a Fault, which my Friends perhaps were too tender of reproving, or too shy of mentioning? However, I will extract the Good for my own use, and leave the Evil Intention, if any there were, with him that it belongs to: If he be my Enemy, I am resolv'd nevertheless to be the better for him; and if he did mean me ill, I shall most certainly defeat him, for he shall never more have opportunity to cast this Failing in my Teeth, till I have seriously and thoroughly repented of it.

On the other hand, if he be accused without any apparent Reason, or just Ground, he will comfort himself still in his own Innocence; but yet he will not throw the Accusation by in disdain, as being altogether useless as well as groundless. He will first examine himself strictly, whether any Action of his has given colour to suspicion, or handle to Mis-interpretation: and, tho' he should find none such, yet he will think it imports him to be very cautious for the future. And then he will call himself to Account a second time for those real Faults, which he is conscious to himself of; and which if his Enemy knew, he would be sure to bring upon the Stage, and expose to publick Notice. These therefore he will take care to correct and amend in time, lest, upon some more unwelcome Discovery, they should bring him shame and trouble hereafter. And even tho' his Enemy should have hitherto found no occasion to accuse him, nor laid hold of any to traduce him, yet the very Apprehension that the
Eye

Eye of an Enemy (so sharp-sighted to spy what is amiss) is continually upon him, will, in point of Prudence, oblige him to comport himself with all possible *Decorum*, and carefully to abstain from all appearance of Evil: that so Malice it self, when most disposed to mischief, may want even the plausible Ground of a just Exception against him. And from these Instances, as well as others that might be given, it is evident enough, that the meek and patient Christian, who, amidst all Insults and Injuries, still preserves the Command of himself entire, has great Opportunities of Exercising and Improving his Virtue; and of dextrously applying that to his own Advantage, which perhaps was mischievously and maliciously levell'd against him. And this is the happy Privilege which he always has, and which No-body can take from him, of *Overcoming Evil with Good*; and by the powerful Aid of Divine Grace, extracting *Good* out of *Evil*.

And now I have said what occur'd to my Thoughts concerning this Argument, referring you in passing, to the Testimony of some of the best Heathen Writers; not for Confirmation sake (for that the Apostle's Authority wholly supercedes) but only to shew, that even Natural Reason, when he judges with any Care or Application, very freely gives it Suffrage of Consent and Approbation to one of the most difficult Duties in the whole Christian Religion. And, after having given you the Prospect of so noble a Victory, permit me only to add some few Reasons and Motives, to spur you forward, as well as direct you in the pursuit of it, and I have done. And,

First, Left, by being unprepared for the Onset, we should unhappily fall short of the Victory, it will be necessary to take the World, as it is for a place that is full of Mischief and Wickedness; and to consider Virtue and Vice, as ancient Opposites; and Good, and Evil, as perpetual Combatants therein. From whence the true Conclusion will be, That it is a vain Thing for any Man to hope, to steer quiet and unmolested through so rough and dangerous a Sea. And, (to apply some of the Words of a Celebrated Author, * himself sufficiently toss'd upon these Waves) "The best Provision that Men can make for their Voyage, besides a lasting Stock of Innocency, and a firm Trust in GOD, that he will never suffer that Innocency to be utterly oppress'd, is, an expectation of the Gusts and Storms of Rumour, Detraction and Envy; and a Resolution not to be over-sensible of all Calumnies, Unkindness or Injustice; but to believe, That the best way of convincing Scandals, is, by neglecting them, to appear not to deserve them." And, since this is a Purgatory that must be pass'd through, a Conflict that cannot well be avoided in the faithful Discharge of our Duty, that the best way of *Overcoming Evil*, is to do *Good*, and persevere in it; and that this is the Triumph which the Christian should prefer before all other Trophies. And,

Secondly, This persuasion once well fix'd in the mind, it will be fit to be remember'd, that the injurious Treatment, and malicious Opposition

† Lord Clarendon, *Hist. Vol. 2. p. 299.*

which good Men must expect to meet with in their passage through the World, is at once, a gallant Exercise for their Virtue, and the proper Test of their Sincerity. For if it were the privilege of Virtue to be Exempt from Troubles, and the Persons of good Men were to be look'd upon as Sacred and Inviolable under its Protection, this would make it a cheap and easie Thing; and render the Commendation that belongs to it as small as the Difficulty that attends it; and reduce the Proof to little or nothing of certainty. But now when it is the common Lot of the Virtuous to be exposed to many Inconveniences, and terrible Conflicts in the course of their Duty; this enures their Virtue to Discipline, and helps to refine and perfect it. And if they are able to sustain the Combat with Courage, and persist with Constancy to the end, this proves beyond a Question, that they are Virtuous upon Principle; upon the stable Principle of a sincere Love to GOD, and a fix'd Trust and Affiance in him. And it is observable, that *Plato* * himself, in order to assay and prove a Virtue that is truly Genuine, makes it requisite, that an Innocent Person should labour under some heavy Imputation of Guilt; and that, when thus put to the question concerning his Innocence, he should not grow tender, and flinch for fear of that Infamy with which he is unjustly loaded, but continue stedfast and unmoveable even unto Death. In which 'tis probable he might have the Example of *Socrates*, the Famous Heathen Martyr, (if I may so call him) in his Eye. And if an Heathen could think it requisite or reasonable to submit to so severe a Trial, how much more should the Christian; whose Life, by solemn Vow, is a State of perpetual Warfare; and whose Ensign is the Cross; and those whose Religion is diametrically opposite to the Maxims and Manners, the Policies and Practices of a wicked World?

Thirdly, It may very fitly be urged, as a farther Incitement to us, that in this very Thing, *i. e.* in doing *Good* and suffering *Evil* with Resolution and Courage, and in overcoming the latter by the power of the former, a *Christian* ought to distinguish himself above other Men; that in this his Glory and Perfection do chiefly consist; and for this will his Recompence be proportionably enlarg'd. *To love those that love us*, Luk. 6. 36. is but a mean Attainment in comparison; for even *Sinners do the same*. But, to return Love for Hatred, and Good for Evil, to be Kind and Beneficent to the most Ill-deserving, This is a most exalted Pitch of Goodness, [*Chrysost. ad Rom. Hom. 22.*] When that which have tired an ordinary Man's Patience, and baffled his Resolution, is made the occasion of Victory and Triumph; This is the mighty Power of God; This is the Race whose Goal is Heaven; This is a Spectacle for Angels, says *St. Chrysostom* upon the place.

And our Blessed Lord himself made no less, but rather a higher Account of it: For after he had given his particular Command, that we should *love our Enemies*, &c. *Matth. 5. 44.* He adds, to create a pious Emu-

* *L. 2. de R. Pub. Vide etiam Grot. in Matth. 5. 12.*

lation in us, *That ye may be the Children of your Father which is in Heaven*, ver. 45. Who does good in spite of all Provocation to the most unthankful and injurious. This therefore is what he proposes, in order to bring us to the nearest resemblance with God; and to the highest degree of Perfection, *Even to be perfect as our Father which is in Heaven is perfect*, ver. 48. And to this he hath given his most emphatical Blessing, and a most gracious Promise of transcendent Glory hereafter: *Blessed, says He, are ye, when Men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake*, ver. 11, 12. *Rejoyce, and be exceeding glad; for great is your Reward in Heaven: for so persecuted they the Prophets which were before you.* Which leads me to the mention of the

Fourth and last Motive, which I shall now offer you, viz. The Example of great and good Men in all Ages; but more especially of our Crucify'd Saviour, and his glorious Company of Apostles: Of him, *Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously*, 2 Pet. 2. 22, 23. Of them, who in all things approved them as the Ministers of Christ, and his faithful Followers, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report; as deceivers and yet true; in much patience, in afflictions, distresses, in necessities, in imprisonments, and deaths for his Name sake, 2 Cor. 6. Wherefore seeing we are also encompassed about with so great a Cloud of Witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our Faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the Cross, despising the Shame, and is set down at the right hand of God, Heb. 12. 1, &c. Let us consider him, that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself: Let us consider the noble Pattern that He has left us: Consider the happy End of our Faith and Hope, and the Glorious Crown of all our Labours and our Sufferings: And, upon all the Invitations, let us prepare to follow the Lamb, whithersoever he hath gone before us. And, when at any time we are traduc'd or oppress'd, wrongfully condemn'd, or furiously persecuted; let us call to mind, that this is the Christian's Trial of Masteries for Heaven; This is the good Fight we have to fight; This is the Course we have to finish; This is the happy opportunity of Overcoming Evil with Good; This the Way that leads to Conquest and Renown; *That the Trial of our Faith, being much more precious than of Gold that periseth, though it be try'd with fire, might be found unto Praise, and Honour, and Glory, at the Appearing of Jesus Christ.* Amen.

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